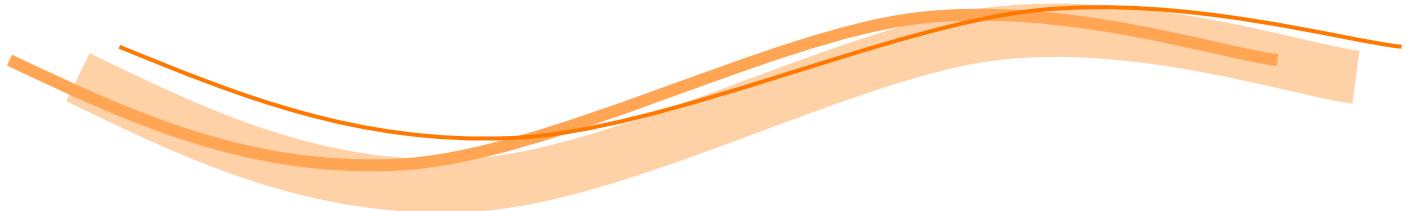




SWITZERLAND





SWITZERLAND	<p>One of the defining aspects of Switzerland are its breathtaking views. This is a country where you will find cable cars with views, hotels with views, trains with views</p> <p>Switzerland is celebrating two special anniversaries that also relate back to those views – 150 years of Winter Tourism and 150 years since the first ascent of the Matterhorn made in 1865 by a party led by Edward Whymper. It ended disastrously when four of its members fell to their deaths on the descent, and the north face was not climbed until 1931.</p> <p>The best way to get around in Switzerland is by public transportation. This year is the 25th anniversary of the Swiss Pass – so you can get 25% off the 4 or 8 day first class Swiss Pass. The Swiss Pass entitles you to unlimited travel on consecutive days throughout the rail, bus and boat network of the Swiss Travel System. And it even better value for families, as accompanying children under 16 travel for free.</p> <p>In conjunction with the Swiss Pass you can book the Swiss Peak Pass. Also available for 4 or 8 days, the Peak Pass gives access to some of Switzerland's most majestic peaks via mountain trains and cable cars.</p> <p>To take in those wonderful Swiss views there are a number of transportation highlights that get you up, close and personal with mountains and the Swiss culture.</p> <p>The Chocolate Train combines two things that the Swiss do really well – chocolate and cheese! The tour visits the scenic medieval city of Montreaux as well as the Nestlé Factory and the Gruyères cheese factory.</p>
Location	Switzerland borders France in the West, Germany in the north, Austria and the principality of Liechtenstein in the east and Italy in the south.
Geography	Switzerland has an area of 41,285 square kilometres. The productive area - that is, the area without the lakes, rivers, unproductive vegetation and no vegetation at all - covers 30,753 square km. The Jura, the Plateau and the Alps form the three main geographic regions of the country. The highest point is Dufour Peak, in the Monte Rosa mountain range, at 4,634 m (15,203 feet) The lowest point is Lake Maggiore (Ticino) at 193 m (633 feet) There are 1,484 lakes and 140 glaciers.
Name	The English name Switzerland is a compound containing Switzer, an obsolete term for the Swiss, which was in use during the 16th to 19th centuries. The English adjective Swiss is a loan from French Suisse,

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	also in use since the 16th century. The name Switzer is from the Alemannic Schwiizer, an inhabitant of Schwyz and its associated territory, one of the Waldstätten cantons which formed the nucleus of the Old Swiss Confederacy.
Population	There are approximately 8 million people in Switzerland. Demographic trends are being influenced by multilingualism, the rising average age and the high proportion of foreigners living in the country.
Language	Switzerland has four unevenly distributed languages and a wealth of dialects. German (65.6 %) German is by far the most widely spoken language in Switzerland: 19 of the country's 26 cantons are predominantly (Swiss) German-speaking. French (22.8 %) French is spoken in the western part of the country, the "Suisse Romande." Four cantons are French-speaking: Geneva, Jura, Neuchâtel and Vaud. Three cantons are bilingual: in Bern, Fribourg and Valais both French and German are spoken. Italian (8.4 %) Italian is spoken in Ticino and four southern valleys of Canton Graubünden. Rhaeto-Rumantsch (0.5 %) Rumantsch is spoken in the only trilingual canton, Graubünden. The other two languages spoken there are German and Italian. Rumantsch, like Italian and French, is a language with Latin roots. It is spoken by just 0.5% of the total Swiss population.
Currency	Switzerland remains with the Swiss franc, usually indicated as CHF. While Switzerland is not part of the European Union and thus is not obliged to convert to the Euro, many prices are still indicated in euros so that visitors may compare prices. Merchants may accept euros but are not obliged to do so. Change given back to the client will most likely be in Swiss francs. The current rate of exchange as at May 2014 is \$1 CDN = 0.81 Swiss franc
Tipping	You never have to worry about tipping in Switzerland, as tips are included in the price. You can, however, add a smile to the face of someone who has provided good service by rounding up to the nearest franc or round figure.
Government	Switzerland is a federal parliamentary republic consisting of 26 cantons, with Bern as the seat of the federal authorities.
Documentation	Every traveler must have a valid passport. Visas are required for a continuous stay of more than three months. If your stay is shorter than three months you only need to bring your valid passport with you.
Time zone	During the winter, Central European Time (CET) applies in Switzerland. From the end of March to the end of October, Summer Time applies (CET + 1 hour). This means that Switzerland is generally six hours

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	ahead of EST in Montreal and Toronto.
Health	Drinking and eating-out is hygienic and the tap water is safe. Immunization for contagious diseases is only required if the traveler has been in an infected area within 14 days preceding arrival in Switzerland. Personal travel insurance is strongly recommended, including coverage of personal accident, sickness, loss or damage to luggage and personal effects and cancellation charges.
Safety tips	Switzerland has one of the lowest crime rates of all industrialized countries. But it is always wise to keep an eye on wallets and luggage in busy areas.

CLIMATE	
General climate	<p>The climate is moderate with no excessive heat, cold or humidity. From July to August the daytime temperature range is 18 to 28 °C and from January to February the range is -2 to 7 °C. In spring and autumn, the daytime temperature range is 8 to 15 °C.</p> <p>Depending on the altitude the temperature range may vary. It is highly recommended to visitors to pack a sweater, good walking shoes, sunscreen, sunglasses, a compact umbrella and/or a light rain coat.</p> <p>The winters were formerly generally cold and snowy, but now freezing temperatures and snow are no longer the rule, especially in the lowlands. Nowadays, many ski resorts could hardly survive without artificial snow.</p> <p>In spring (March to May) the trees blossom and the meadows turn green. Sometimes in April the winter returns for a short period and sometimes there are summer conditions as early as May.</p> <p>Summer temperatures rise to 25 to 30°C, with temperatures exceeding the 30°C mark during hot summers.</p>
Today's weather	Today (May 10 th 2014) Zurich will be 20C and sunny – a lovely spring day!
Best time to visit	Summer is best for sightseeing and winter is obviously the season for winter sports fans...but really any time of year works here!

GETTING AROUND	
Getting There	Access from Canada is excellent: here are the flight options in 2014: - Toronto direct to Zurich on Air Canada - Montreal direct to Zurich on SWISS - Montreal direct to Geneva on Air Canada - Seasonal: Montreal direct to Basel on Air Transat - Seasonal: Vancouver direct to Zurich on Edelweiss
Cities	The main cities and their populations are: Zürich: 377,000 Geneva: 188,000 Basel: 164,500

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Bern: 125,500
Lausanne: 129,000
Winterthur: 103,000
St. Gallen: 73,500
Lucerne: 78,000
Lugano: 55,000

Zurich

Close to the northern border of Switzerland, Zurich is not only the country's largest city, but also one of the most scenic capitals of the world, famous for its lakeside promenades set against a backdrop of towering mountains. The lakeside quays lead to the Alstadt, or Old Town, presided over by the city's two most historic churches, Fraumünster and Grossmünster. For a view of the Alps, visitors head for Uetliberg. Two of Europe's greatest museums call Zurich home: the Rietberg with its magnificent non-European art collection, and the Bührle with its array of modern art.

Basel

In northwestern Switzerland, Basel, the capital of the region, is an ancient university town and trading center on the Rhine, set midway between French Alsace and the Jura canton in Switzerland. The Jura is a range of "folded" limestone ridges between two great rivers, the Rhône and the Rhine.

Lausanne & the Shores of Lake Geneva

Lake Geneva is the largest freshwater body in central Europe, covering some 583 sq. km. It's partially fed by the alpine waters of the Rhône and is emptied by a continuation of the same river, which eventually pours into the Mediterranean. Lausanne, the cultural centre of the area, is the second-largest city on Lake Geneva and the fifth largest in Switzerland.

Geneva

Geneva, Switzerland's second-largest city, is distinctly different from the rest of Switzerland and culturally more attuned to France. It's built on the Rhône, at the lower end of Lake Geneva, and is bordered on three sides by French territory. This center of world banking and commerce - and the site of many world organizations, such as the Red Cross - is celebrated for its prosperity, elegance, and sophistication.

Montreux

Nestling between Lake Geneva and the steep mountains, Montreux enjoys a Mediterranean microclimate. In July it comes alive with the rhythm of the Montreux Jazz Festival: 20 days of concerts and some

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	250,000 visitors. From Montreux station, a cogwheel train takes visitors on a one hour journey to Rochers-de-Naye where they can enjoy 360° views of Lake Geneva and the Alps. During the Jazz Festival trains and boats both literally and figuratively transport you to musical discovery outdoors.
Distances	Switzerland measures 220 kilometers from north to south and 350 km from east to west.
Boats	The banana-shaped Lake Zürich is framed on the southern side by the Albis and Zimmerberg hills and on the north by the Pfannenstiel chain of hills. The lake is bordered by the cantons of Zürich, St.Gallen and Schwyz. At the western end lies Zürich, Switzerland's largest city. The lake today is a popular place for excursions, and homes along its shores are much sought after. Gently rocking waves, peace and quiet, relaxation and fine food: the best way to discover the Lake Zürich area is by taking a boat trip. Most of the places around the shore are served by a regular boat service all year round. The undisputed favourites with the public are the two historic paddle-steamers. From the "Gipfeli-Schiff" (early mornings) to the "Sonnenuntergangs-Schiff" (sunset sailings), there are all kinds of special excursions available. Musical trips and special tours on public holidays are all part of the programme offered by the Lake Zürich shipping company.
Trains	Switzerland has a really efficient rail network that is a very practical way of getting around the country. Here are some highlights: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- 25th anniversary of Swiss Pass - special Peak Pass this year- kids up to 16 free- Scenic Trains- Chocolate / Cheese Train- Montreux Jazz Festival Train & Boat- Rail Jubilees
Car Rental	I think that the best way to get around is by public transportation as the system of buses and railways here is excellent. However, for independent travelers, all the international car rental companies are available at the entry airports.
Buses	For those areas not accessible by train, the prolific bus and coach network allows visitors
Passes	This year is the 25th anniversary of the Swiss Pass – so you can get 25% off the 4 or 8 day first class Swiss Pass. The Swiss Pass entitles you to unlimited travel on consecutive days throughout the rail, bus and boat network of the Swiss Travel System. And it even better value for families, as accompanying children under 16 travel for free.
ACCOMMODATION TYPES	Most tourist areas in Switzerland have a tourist office where you can call and have them book a hotel for you for a small fee. Each town usually has a comprehensive list of hotels on their web site, and it is often

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	<p>easiest to simply call down the list to make a reservation rather than try to book online. Many hotels will request that you fax or email them your credit card information in order to secure a reservation. In general, hotel staff are helpful and competent, and speak English quite well. Hotel rates in Switzerland can get quite expensive, especially in popular ski resort areas. There is also a hostel network in Switzerland for students. Types of hotels in Switzerland include historic hotels, traditional hotels, inns located in the country, spas and bed and breakfasts.</p>
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LIFESTYLES	
Kids	<p>The major sight of Lucerne is something the whole family can enjoy: the Verkehrshaus der Schweiz (Swiss Transport Museum). There's everything from spaceships to an adventure ride called the Gotthard Tunnel Show here. There's even the Longies planetarium where space travel is simulated. In the afternoon, take the kids to the Bourbaki Panorama, a replica of the famous 19th-century battle, followed by an excursion on one of the flotilla of lake steamers plying across Lake Lucerne. Some summer boat excursions last 4 hours, and there is a cafeteria onboard.</p> <p>Bern: the Bärengraben (Bear Pits) is a surefire winner. These pampered bears are the best fed in Europe, carrots being their favorite food. Families may also enjoy the Zytgloggeturm (Clock Tower), which, 4 minutes before the hour, stages the oldest and biggest horological puppet show, with mechanical bears and the like. Another popular attraction is the Dählhölzli Tierpark, one of the best zoos in Switzerland, with everything from exotic reptiles to musk oxen. Later, an excursion to Mount Gurten at 844m (2,768 ft.) is recommended. Not only do you get a panoramic view, but there's also a children's fairyland on-site.</p>
Teens	<p>If you have active teens, then this is perfect vacation territory for them. The hiking is first class and many of the peaks are safe to hike to the summit which gives teens a real sense of achievement. Also, the many spectacular transports to more inaccessible peaks such as cable cars and rack and pinion railways are an adventure in themselves!</p>
Romance	<p>My recommendation for the most romantic spots in Switzerland centre around the southernmost part of the country where the "Italian" lakes reach in to Swiss territory – a perfect mix of spectacular scenery, warm climate, romantic accommodations and great food and wine!</p>
Seniors	<p>Because the transport systems in Switzerland are so well organized and civilized, this is a good destination for Seniors. There are plenty of tours available to see all the sights and for the more active Seniors, the walking opportunities are everywhere.</p>

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UNIQUES	"Swissness" The language communities eat different things and have different traditions and customs. Even their shared history only goes back about two centuries. The Swiss themselves are sometimes puzzled about what they have in common apart from their passport, what it is that makes them Swiss. The Swiss say they are held together by the desire to stay united. The general attitude is summed up in the formula "unity, but not uniformity"
Surprising	Next year, 2015, celebrates 150 years of first ascent of the Matterhorn made in 1865 by a party led by Edward Whymper. It ended disastrously when four of its members fell to their deaths on the descent. The North Face was not climbed until 1931.
History	Despite its neutral image, Switzerland has a fascinating history of external and internal conflicts. Its strategic location at the crossroads of Europe made it an irresistible object to empires since Roman times. There's even evidence that prehistoric tribes struggled to hold tiny settlements along the great Rhône and Rhine rivers. The first identifiable occupants were the Celts, who entered the alpine regions from the west. The Helvetii, a Celtic tribe, inhabited a portion of the country that became known as Helvetia. The tribe was defeated by Julius Caesar when it tried to move into southern France in 58 B.C. The Romans conquered the resident tribes in 15 B.C., and peaceful colonization continued until A.D. 455 when the barbarians invaded, followed later by the Christians. Charlemagne (742-814) conquered the small states, or cantons, that occupied the area now known as Switzerland and incorporated them into his realm, which later became the Holy Roman Empire. In later years, Switzerland became a battleground for some of the major ruling families of Europe, especially the Houses of Savoy, the Habsburgs, and the Zähringen. The Swiss have always guarded their territory jealously. In 1291, an association of three cantons formed the Perpetual Alliance -- the nucleus of today's Swiss Confederation. To be rid of the grasping Habsburgs, the Confederation broke free of the Holy Roman Empire in 1439. It later signed a treaty with France, a rival power, agreeing to provide France with mercenary troops. This led to Swiss fighting Swiss in the early 16th century. The agreement was ended around 1515, and in 1516, the confederates declared their complete neutrality. The Protestant Reformation created bitter conflicts in Switzerland between those cantons defending papal Catholicism and those embracing the new creed of Protestantism. Ulrich Zwingli, who like Martin Luther had converted from the Catholic faith, led the Swiss Reformation, beginning in 1519. He translated the Bible into Swiss-German and reorganized church rituals. The Protestant movement was spurred by the 1536 arrival in Geneva of John Calvin,

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	<p>who was fleeing Catholic reprisals in France. Geneva became one of the most rigidly puritanical strongholds of Protestantism in Europe, fervently committed to its self-perceived role as the New Jerusalem. The spread of Calvinism led to the coining of the French term "Huguenot," a corruption of the Swiss word Eidgenosse (confederate). After Zwingli died in a religiously motivated battle in 1531, the Swiss spirit of compromise came into play and a peace treaty was signed, allowing each region the right to practice its own faith. Today, 55% of the Swiss define themselves as Protestant, 43% as Roman Catholic, and 2% as members of other faiths. Despite the deep divisions within the confederation created by the Reformation, the confederates managed to stay together by adopting a pragmatic approach to their religious and political differences. Such an approach to national issues, based on compromise, remains one of the cornerstones of the Swiss political system. Later, during the Thirty Years' War (1618-48), the Swiss remained neutral while civil wars flared around them. 18th-century Switzerland became the most industrialized nation in Europe. But rapid population growth created social problems, widening the division between the new class of wealth and the rest of the population. Uprisings occurred, but it was only after the French Revolution that they had an effect, causing the Swiss Confederation to collapse in 1798. Under French guardianship, progressives moved to centralize the constitution of the Swiss Republic. This pull toward centralization clashed with the federalist traditions of the semi-independent cantons. In 1803, Napoleon Bonaparte established a confederation with 19 cantons, but when he fell from power, Swiss conservatives revived the old order. Much of the social progress resulting from the Napoleonic period was reversed and the aristocrats had their former privileges restored to them. Current Swiss boundaries were fixed at the Congress of Vienna in 1814. In 1848, a federal constitution was adopted and Bern established as the capital.</p>
Recommended Reading	Frommer's Switzerland is my guide book of choice when I visit the country. Probably the most famous Swiss literary creation, Heidi, the story of an orphan girl who lives with her grandfather in the Alps, is one of the most popular children's books ever and has come to be a symbol of Switzerland. Her creator, Johanna Spyri (1827–1901), wrote a number of other books around similar themes.
1000 Places to See Before You Die	There are seven entries for Switzerland in the new edition: The Alps' Most Scenic Train Trips:-

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	<p>Basel: Art City – crossroads of creativity Gstaad – magnificent mountain playground High-Country Hiking – walking on top of the world Davos-Klosters – a pair of peak performers St Moritz and the Engadine Valley – top notch skiing Lucerne Riviera – lakeside music mecca Lugano – Swiss living Italian style</p>
Must Sees	<p>Switzerland has eleven UNESCO World Heritage Sites – an amazing number for a small country:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Abbey of St GallBenedictine Convent of St John at MüstairOld City of BerneThree Castles, Defensive Wall and Ramparts of the Market Town of BellinzonaSwiss Alps Jungfrau-AletschMonte San GiorgioLavaux, Vineyard TerracesRhaetian Railway in the Albula / Bernina LandscapesSwiss Tectonic Arena SardonaLa Chaux-de-Fonds / Le Locle, Watchmaking Town PlanningPrehistoric Pile dwellings around the Alps

SPORTS ACTIVITIES	
Golf	<p>Idyllic hilly landscapes, enchanting woods, shimmering lakes and crystal-clear rivers surrounded by picturesque villages are hard to beat as ideal environment for a good and relaxing round of golf.</p> <p>There are twelve golf courses just in and around Zurich and many more around the country.</p>
Fishing	<p>Fishing is a popular pastime in Switzerland and opportunities abound in lakes and rivers all over the country. There is even a Fishing Museum in the heart of the Old Town of Zug which combines a wealth of information and exhibits for the keen fisherman.</p>
Horse riding	<p>There are 362 entries for horse riding on the Swiss Tourism website – so I think it's fair to say that there are plenty of opportunities for riding amidst Switzerland's beautiful scenery. Here is but one representative example from that long list:</p> <p>Centre Equestre de Champéry CH- 1874 Champéry Phone: +41 (0)24 479 20 20 info@champery.ch and website http://www.champery.ch</p> <p>This Equestrian Centre, established over 25 years ago, is situated in the heart of the village, near the Office of Tourism. The stables house six docile horses from the Franches-Montagnes region, so outings on horseback may be organized for individuals or for groups. Children will</p>

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	<p>love riding the ponies with rides of an hour or more through the village or out into the surrounding forests. They can plan a variety of outings, whether you want to spend one hour on horseback or several days riding in the mountains with barbecues and "nights on the farm".</p>
Hiking	<p>Purchase the world's best footpath maps and walk 20-30 kms a day over some of the most wonderful and clearly-marked paths, whether it is in a valley, through a forest, or over mountains. There are more than 60,000 km well maintained and documented hiking trails. The trails are well-planned, easy to follow, and the yellow trail signs are actually accurate in their estimate as to how far away the next hamlet, village, town or city is - once you've figured out how many kilometers per hour you walk (easy to determine after a day of hiking).</p>
Cycling	<p>There are numerous cycle routes in Switzerland, but there are also specially marked routes for mountain bikers. In principle you can load a cycle yourself onto all trains. Prohibited trains are indicated with a symbol on the timetable and on the yellow departure boards. The blue Train information notice- on the platforms shows you the point where you can load your bicycle. The bicycles can be loaded onto the entry platforms of the passenger compartments marked with a large cycle pictogram or into the luggage compartments, provided there is room. The Station cycle hire- is the best alternative to transporting your own bicycle. At around 100 stations of the SBB (Swiss Federal Railways) and of private railways throughout Switzerland different types of bicycle (Country bike, mountain bike, children's bicycles), in top condition, can be hired.</p>
Skiing	<p>The skiing here is simply second to none. Nothing beats pausing on your run to look up at the classic shape of the Matterhorn in Zermatt. And once while skiing in the neighbouring valley of Saas-Fe, we had so much snow that the valley was cut off and we had to be air-lifted out by helicopter!</p> <p>Here are a few specific recommendations:</p> <p>Arosa</p> <p>One of the most isolated of eastern Switzerland's resorts, Arosa is a relative newcomer to the country's ski scene. Drawing a young crowd, it's filled with contemporary buildings rather than traditional, chalet-inspired architecture. Ample annual snowfall, vast alpine meadows, and only one steeply inclined road into town make Arosa ideal for escapists and nature lovers. Families with children usually like the place too. Not as stratospherically expensive or pretentious as St. Moritz, Arosa offers lots of runs for intermediate skiers. Some of the resort's most dramatic slopes, which drop more than 1,000m (3,280 ft.) from beginning to end, are only for very experienced athletes.</p>

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Davos

It's larger, with many more hotels, restaurants, après-ski bars, and discos than its neighbor, Klosters, with which it shares access to a sweeping network of ski lifts and slopes. Davos attracts a sometimes-curious mixture of the very wealthy and the more modest. It has slopes that appeal to advanced skiers, intermediates, and beginners. One of the most challenging runs descends from Weissflühgipfel at 2,622m (8,600 ft.) to Küblis at 810m (2,657 ft.).

Klosters: Named after a 13th-century cloister founded on the site, this resort is smaller, more intimate, and less urban than its nearest major competitor, Davos. A favorite of the royal families of both Sweden and Britain, it offers at least two easily accessible ski zones, the snowfields of the Gotschna-Parsenn and the Madrisa. There's a wide range of trails and facilities, offering challenges to all skill levels.

St. Moritz

The premier ski and social resort of eastern Switzerland, St. Moritz draws a lot of folks familiar with the art of conspicuous consumption; this is as close as you'll get to Hollywood in Switzerland. It's more distinctly Austrian than French in its flavor. Although only one or two authentic buildings remain from the town's medieval origins, vast amounts of money have been spent installing folkloric fixtures, carved paneling, and accents of local granite in the public and private areas of most hotels. Skiing in the region is divided into distinct areas, the most popular of which is Corviglia, on the mountains above St. Moritz. Adventurers seeking diversion farther afield head for the slopes above the satellite resort of Sils Maria (Corvatsch) and the slopes above the nearby village of Pontresina (Diavolezza). There are plenty of difficult slopes in the region if you seek them out, but intermediate-level skiers enjoy taking a cable car from St. Moritz-Dorf to the top of Piz Corvatsch, almost 3,401m (11,155 ft.) above sea level. From here, with only one cable-car connection en route, you can ski a network of intermediate-level trails all the way back down to the resort's lake. St. Moritz boasts some of the most dependable annual snowfalls in Switzerland.

Other Activities

Paragliding, caving, mountaineering, canyoning, kayaking, bob sleighing, mountain biking, marathon running up mountains, river rafting...you name it...it's all available here!

CULTURE

Arts

Switzerland's museums and art collections are known throughout the world. Among them are the Public Art Collection in Basel and the Oskar Reinhart Foundation in Winterthur. Also major are the art museums of Zurich, Bern (including the Klee Foundation), and Geneva, as well as the Avegg Foundation in Bern (Riggisberg) and the Foundation Martin

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	<p>Bodmer (Geneva-Cologny). The Swiss National Museum in Zurich contains valuable exhibits on history and archaeology. There are also museums of church treasures and ethnological displays.</p>
Music	<p>For most of its history, religious and folk music has dominated this art form in Switzerland. Traditional instruments included the hammered dulcimer, the fife, the bagpipe, the cittern, the shawm, and the hurdy-gurdy.</p> <p>Beginning in 1836, the accordion swept the country. The Swiss quickly incorporated this instrument into their folk music. As more and more Swiss moved to the cities, folk music from rural areas was mixed with jazz and the foxtrot, with the saxophone coming into great prominence. By the 1960s, trios of two accordions and a double bass ruled the night. Pop and rock invaded Switzerland in the 1960s, much to the horror of traditionalists. Swiss musicians like Les Aiglons or Les Faux Frères became major recording artists. Swiss rock began to die out in the late '60s, replaced by more progressive music such as jazz and blues. Hard rock appeared by the end of the '70s, and a rock band called Krokus became the most popular recording group in the history of Swiss music.</p> <p>Metal bands dominated music in the 1980s, with a Swiss band, Celtic Frost, the leader of the pack. Swiss new-wave bands began to branch out and become internationally known. Fame came to such bands as Kleenex/LiliPUT and Yello.</p> <p>Rappers and DJs arrived on the scene in the '90s, including Black Tiger from Basel, the first one to rap in a Swiss-German dialect. Birthed in the 1990s, the band Gotthard survived the millennium to become the leading Swiss rock group and one of the most acclaimed bands in western Europe.</p>
Film	<p>The dramatic geography of the country has often made it a locale for filmmakers from all over the world. Of course, the all-time Swiss classic is Heidi, shot in 1937 and starring Shirley Temple as Heidi.</p> <p>One of the best James Bond films, Goldfinger (1964), uses Switzerland in some of its backdrop scenes with star Sean Connery. Secret Agent 007 returned to Switzerland for more background scenes in the 1969 On Her Majesty's Secret Service and the 1995 Goldeneye. The 1994 version of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, directed by Kenneth Branagh, also used dramatic Swiss backdrops.</p> <p>Director Blake Edwards used Gstaad and its swanky Palace Hotel for The Return of the Pink Panther (1975). The Bernese Oberland is showcased, perhaps as never before, in Clint Eastwood's The Eiger Sanction (1975). A Zurich bank figures into the plot of The Bourne Identity (2002), starring Matt Damon. The thriller is based very loosely on Robert Ludlum's novel.</p>

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Museums	The Swiss National Museum in Zurich The National Museum houses the largest cultural and historical collection in the country. With everything from substantive legacies of art and crafts to ordinary everyday objects, the museum reveals the life of the Swiss, from prehistory to the present. Special exhibitions focus on socially relevant issues, offering a temporary change of perspective. Gustav Gull built the Swiss National Museum in 1898 to mark the 50th anniversary of the first federal constitution. The museum building, set between the main train station and the Platzspitz Park, is reminiscent of a fairytale castle.
Festivals	L'Escalade On December 11, 1602, the city of Geneva was attacked by Savoyard soldiers trying to scale its ramparts. The duke of Savoy had lost his former possession and wanted it back. Alas, it was not to be. The denizens of Geneva valiantly held out, and one brave Amazon, Mère Royaume, scaled the ramparts and poured a pot of hot soup on the head of a Savoyard soldier. For 3 days and nights beginning December 11, normally staid Geneva becomes virtually Rabelaisian, staging torchlight marches, country markets, and fife-and-drum parades, as a festive crowd in period costumes marches through the streets of the old city. Many present-day Mère Royaumes - armed with soup pots, of course - can be seen. Vogel Gryff Volksfest This colourful tradition has a griffin, a lion, and a "wild man of the woods" floating down the Rhine, followed by dancing in the streets. It occurs alternately on January 13, 20, or 27 (changes every year). On a wintry day in January, a raft floats down the Rhine, laden with two drummers, two men with large flags, and two cannoneers who repeatedly fire gun salutes. The principal figure is a savage masked man carrying an uprooted pine tree. At Mittlerebrücke (the middle bridge), he's met by a lion and a bird with an awesome beak. At noon, the three figures dance on the bridge to the sound of drums. The Wilder Mann (savage man), the Leu (lion), and the Vogel Gryff (griffin) are old symbols for three Basel societies that could be called neighbourhoods today. Throughout the afternoon and evening, street dancing in Basel honors the occasion, which originated in the 16th century. The purpose of all this madness? Ostensibly, to strengthen community ties. Celebrating the Onion If your favorite sandwich consists of only bread, mayonnaise, and onions, or your idea of humour is to poke fun at buffoons disguised as onions, you'll love the Swiss capital's celebration of Zibelemärit, held annually on the fourth Monday of November. During the festival, huge

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sections of the city's historic centre are filled with vegetable stalls featuring plaited strings of onions (more than 100 tons may be sold in a day here) and other winter vegetables. The barrels of confetti thrown by competing camps of high-spirited students offer endless photo ops. Facetiously dressed jesters appear in bars and restaurants to poke fun (usually in Swiss-German) at the sometimes-pompous political posturing of their governmental elders.

ATTRACTIOnS	
Beaches	Switzerland is not a destination to come to if you are a seaside beach lover, but there are opportunities to laze away a sunny summer afternoon on some of the lakeside beaches on the larger, lowland lakes.
Nature	<p>A highlight of any hike in the Swiss Alps is wildlife viewing. After years of retreat, populations of wild animals are making a comeback in the Alps as a result of protective measures.</p> <p>Chamois</p> <p>While hiking in the Alps, and particularly on the Haute Route, be on the lookout for Chamois. The chamois is a goat-like animal found at moderately high elevations throughout the Alps. They are agile climbers and if they sense a threat they can ascend 1000 meters in about 15 minutes. Chamois are easily recognized by their white facial markings and the brown stripe the runs along their backbone.</p> <p>Chamois are well-adapted to living in steep, rocky terrain. A fully grown chamois reaches a height of about 2½ feet at the shoulders and weighs about 110 pounds. Both males and females have short horns (10-12 inches) which are slightly curled in the posterior direction. In addition to their alpine habitat, chamois are occasionally spotted in the forests around Zermatt on our Best of the Alps tour and in the rocky crags of the Alpstein mountains in Appenzell.</p> <p>Ibex</p> <p>The Alpine ibex is a mountain goat instantly recognizable by the male's large scimitar-shaped horns which are ridged in the front. Females grow a pair of smaller, thinner horns which develop considerably more slowly than those of the male. The ibex ranges in height from 27 to 43 inches at the shoulder and weighs between 200 to 270 pounds. Ibex are related to domestic goats and will mate with other goats if they are unable to find a mate in the wild.</p> <p>Ibex were hunted to extinction in the early 19th century. By 1856 only 60 Alpine ibex remained on a royal hunting reserve in the Grand Paradiso region of Italy. Some of these ibex were smuggled into Switzerland around 1900 in an effort to reinstate ibex in the Swiss Alps. Under protection, there are now over 40,000 ibex in the Swiss Alps.</p>

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	<p>Ibex are frequently sighted in the most rocky and wild regions of the Swiss Alps along the Haute Route, especially on the Sentier de Chamois in the Upper Val de Bagnes Nature Reserve, where they were reintroduced in 1926, and around the Col de Louvie and the Col de Praefleuri.</p> <p>Red Deer</p> <p>The Red Deer is the predominant deer species in Europe and inhabits the Alps. It is one of the largest deer species, and is larger and generally more majestic than mule deer or whitetail deer found in the US. Generally, the male (stag) Red Deer is typically 41-48 inches high at the shoulders and weighs 350–530 pounds. The female typically weighs in at 264–374 lbs). They are almost always found in a deep forest setting, well below the tree-line.</p> <p>Red deer were extinct in Switzerland by the mid-17th century; however a small population survived in Liechtenstein which migrated to Grison (Graubunden) canton in 1900. Continued protection and migration (plus a lack of natural predators) has resulted in healthy populations of red deer throughout Switzerland today.</p>
Parks	<p>Switzerland has only one national park – but it is sensational! The Swiss National Park www.nationalpark.ch is the biggest conservation area in Switzerland and one of the best-protected natural environments in Europe. The Alpine landscape remains much the same as it was 5,000 years ago, thanks to the banning of hunting, tree felling, meadow mowing or any other human activity deemed to interfere with nature.</p> <p>The park covers an area with altitudes varying between 1,400 and 3,200 metres above sea level, and there is really only one way of seeing it: walking. All 172 sq km of it. Well, maybe not all in one go, but by following one of the numerous marked hiking trails all over the park. In fact, in order that plants and animals may develop naturally, with as little human disturbance as possible, it is strictly forbidden to leave these trails. Hikers can choose from 21 marked paths that run throughout the park, covering considerable differences in altitude and according to physical ability, ranging from an easy three-hour meander through an Alpine forest to an endurance-testing eight-hour hike up all 2,945 metres of Mount Baselgia.</p> <p>If you don't feel like going it alone you can also join a guided excursion (Tuesdays and Thursdays), which lasts about six hours. The park can also be enjoyed on a more laid-back basis. The local PostBus service stops right outside the only hotel in the park, the charmingly old-fashioned Il Fuorn (www.ilfuorn.ch) whose simple rooms, featuring Graubünden pine and larch wood, offer breathtaking views. It's also a good basecamp for enjoying the unique single trails for bikes, which run</p>

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	<p>from Münstertal all the way to Parco Stelvio. Or just head to the restaurant to sample some regional cooking, such as seasonal game or fresh trout washed down with the locally produced pinot blanc. One essential item to pack is a pair of binoculars, so you can fully enjoy the park's extraordinary wildlife. The rasping cry of the dark brown, white-speckled nutcracker bird (the park's national symbol) soon becomes very familiar, as do the sights and sounds of numerous chamois, deer, golden eagles, the occasional bearded vulture and the rather cute marmot (think obese prairie dog) who are often spotted frolicking about. Walkers can also enjoy an amble in the cooling pine forests or a stroll through meadows filled with countless Alpine flowers, which provide a colourful sight along the paths. Particularly noticeable are the yellowish-white edelweiss flowers, which were picked in such vast quantities over the last two centuries that it almost died out. But here it grows in abundance, an iconic symbol of the park's unspoilt natural beauty.</p>
Gardens	<p>There are gardens all over the country. Of particular note are the well-organized botanical gardens in the larger cities. My favourites are the small and scattered Alpine Gardens in places like Schynige Platte (The Plateau) which boasts over 500 types of flora. Take a cog-wheel train trip from Wilderswil to the 1967m (6450ft)-high plateau and be rewarded by magnificent views and an abundance of alpine flora, including Edelweiss. www.alpengarten.ch</p>
Historical Sites	<p>There is so much emphasis on outdoor sports in Switzerland that many visitors forget that it's rich in history and filled with landmarks from the Middle Ages. Explore at random. Visit the castle at Chillon where Lord Byron wrote The Prisoner of Chillon. Or Gruyères, which everyone knows for the cheese, but is also the most craggy castle village of Switzerland, complete with dungeon and spectacular panoramic views. Both Bern and Basel have historic Münsters of cathedrals - the one in Bern dates from the 14th century. Among the great cathedrals, St. Nicholas's Cathedral, in the ancient city of Fribourg near Bern, dominates the medieval quarter, and Schloss Thun, on Lake Thun in the Bernese Oberland, was built by the dukes of Zätingen at the end of the 12th century.</p>

OTHER ACTIVITIES	
Shopping	<p>Switzerland's superb products make it a shopper's paradise. English is spoken in most shops and department stores. Any stay in Switzerland is incomplete without buying a famous Swiss watch. Fine watches come in an infinite variety and are generally less expensive than in others countries.</p> <p>Typical products and souvenirs Chocolates come in a variety of sizes, shapes and flavors. Excellent</p>

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	<p>buys are: textiles, embroideries, fine handkerchiefs, linen, precision instruments, drafting sets, multi-blade pocket knives, music boxes, woodcarvings, ceramics and other handmade items as well as antiques and art books.</p>
Markets	<p>Christmas Markets</p> <p>Basel, Bern and Zurich are the principal Christmas Markets in Switzerland. There are more details about the Basel Christmas Market which incidentally provides a great opportunity for a winter weekend break. Swiss Xmas Markets are full of character and atmosphere – the stalls sell excellent quality goods. Basel Christmas Market is probably the largest, most popular and most traditional one in Switzerland. The Christmas Market in Basel takes place in the atmospheric Old Town and is well worth a visit.</p>
Nightlife	<p>Switzerland's cities offer a variety of evening entertainment. In Zurich, the traditional stomping grounds for night owls lie around the Niederdorf, a neighbourhood within Old Town known for its strip joints, bars, and music halls. There's even a red-light district. Most nightclubs, however, close at 2am, and many of them seem sterile and a bit boring. Geneva, too, despite its Calvinist traditions, has a sophisticated nightlife.</p> <p>It might be more interesting, especially if you're a first-time visitor, to patronize some of the local folkloric places, where you can see and hear yodeling and dancing to alpine music.</p> <p>Theatre presentations tend to be in German or French, so unless you speak either language, these shows may not be for you.</p> <p>Throughout the winter, the après-ski life in Switzerland's high-altitude resorts might best be described as vigorous, with raclette parties, beer drinking in rustic taverns, sleigh rides, and lots of music, much of it brought in by live groups from Great Britain, France, and Germany or from the United States.</p> <p>Many after-dark rendezvous joints close down in summer. The Swiss prefer to drink outside, under the summer sky, perhaps in some beer garden, rather than being cooped up inside a deliberately darkened disco.</p>
Casinos	<p>You will have seen the glittering Swiss casinos in many a motion picture. Now you have the opportunity to see the real thing! From Montreux to Ticino, these are palaces of the rich and my advice is go see, but don't play!</p>

CUISINE	
Food	The cuisine of Switzerland is multifaceted. While some dishes such as fondue, raclette or rösti are omnipresent through the country, each region developed its own gastronomy according to the differences of climate and languages. Traditional Swiss cuisine uses ingredients

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	<p>similar to those in other European countries, as well as unique dairy products and cheeses such as Gruyère or Emmental, produced in the valleys of Gruyères and Emmental. The number of fine-dining establishments is high, particularly in western Switzerland. Chocolate had been made in Switzerland since the 18th century but it gained its reputation at the end of the 19th century with the invention of modern techniques such as conching and tempering which enabled its production on a high quality level. Also a breakthrough was the invention of solid milk chocolate in 1875 by Daniel Peter. The Swiss are the world's largest consumers of chocolate!</p>
Drink	The most popular alcoholic drink in Switzerland is wine. Switzerland is notable for the variety of grapes grown because of the large variations in terroirs, with their specific mixes of soil, air, altitude and light. Swiss wine is produced mainly in Valais, Vaud (Lavaux), Geneva and Ticino, with a small majority of white wines. Vineyards have been cultivated in Switzerland since the Roman era, even though certain traces can be found of a more ancient origin. The most widespread varieties are the Chasselas (called Fendant in Valais) and Pinot noir. The Merlot is the main variety produced in Ticino,
Restaurants	<p>Here are some recommendations from our friends at Frommer's:</p> <p>Kronenhalle Zurich www.kronenhalle.com It has a hearty, rustic alpine theme, but a glance at its menu, its clientele, and its artwork will quickly convince you that this is a supremely distinctive restaurant. Enjoy paintings by such luminaries as Braque, Chengall, Miró, and Picasso as you dine.</p> <p>Rico's Kunststuben Küsnacht www.kunststuben.com Come here for the sublime cuisine of chef Zandonella Rico. Since he opened this acclaimed restaurant south of Zurich, demanding diners have been heading here to partake of the constantly changing specialties. After you've sampled the herby Tuscan dove with pine nuts or his lobster with artichoke and almond oil, you'll know that this is as good as it gets in the Zurich area.</p> <p>Restaurant Stucki Basel www.stuckibasel.ch There are a garden, a collection of upscale antique furniture, a clientele speaking every conceivable European language, and some of the best cuisine in northwestern Switzerland, all based on modern interpretations of French and German recipes.</p> <p>Le Restaurant Pierroz Verbier You'd never know that the simple chalet-style facade of this place shelters one of the most legendary restaurants in the Valais. For</p>

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instance...a platter of sea bass with sea urchins, followed by couscous of crayfish and pigeon with truffles. Gourmets and epicures will cross any number of national borders to sample the creative cuisine of Roland Pierroz.

Le Pont de Brent Brent www.lepontdebrent.com

No one had even heard of Brent until this restaurant opened in a late-19th-century house in the heart of the village. Today, the restaurant has put the village on the map, in part because of the excellence of such dishes as mussel-and-leek soup and roast rabbit with mustard sauce.

Le Chat-Botté Geneva www.beau-rivage.ch

Richly sheathed with tapestries and accented with the kind of art and accessories that would have made Louis XVI feel right at home, this restaurant attracts some of the wealthiest and most jaded clients in the world. Everything works smoothly, with nary a glitch, but you can only imagine how hard the staff labours to maintain its position as one of the best restaurants in Switzerland.

FOR MORE INFO	You can plan your trip to Switzerland by visiting www.mySwitzerland.com
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CHRIS' PERSONAL EXPERIENCES	I have been fortunate enough to travel all over Switzerland. When I was growing up, my family used to come every summer to Grindelwald in the Bernese Oberland and we would spend our time hiking the mountains, taking every conceivable conveyance up into the mountains, strolling around the lakesides and enjoying the great food in the countryside.
Magic Moment	We boarded the Jungfrau Mountain Railway in the pretty mountain village of Grindelwald in the Swiss region called the Bernese Oberland. We paused at Kleine Scheidegg to wander the alpine pastures strewn with bright flowers and then on upwards, as the train tunnels through the North Face of the Eiger to arrive at the highest railway station in Europe at 3,454 metres above sea level. Here we are in a high-Alpine wonderland of ice, snow and rock, far, far removed from the green pastures of the valley. The 360-degree panoramic view takes in the neighbouring countries of France, Germany and Italy. The Aletsch glacier is directly below us. The longest glacier in the Alps, it sweeps in a blindingly white river of ice for 22kms between ranks of towering Alpine peaks and beneath a brilliant blue sky. It's a very special place...

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